

And All in Spite of You by xtremeroswellian

Series: [Chosen Family \[2\]](#)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: But her friends cheer her up, Dustin makes up Party rules on the fly, F/M, Families of Choice, Friendship, Gen, Good Babysitter Steve Harrington, Good Parent Joyce Byers, Joyce Byers should get a mom of the year award, Max is a little depressed, Mentions of attempted rape, Protective Steve Harrington, Steve has basically become her brother, mentions of domestic violence

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mentions of Billy Hargrove, Mentions of Jim Hopper, Mentions of Neil Hargrove, Mike Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Susan Hargrove, Will Byers

Relationships: Dustin Henderson & Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Joyce Byers & Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Maxine "Max" Mayfield/Lucas Sinclair, Mike Wheeler & Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Steve Harrington & Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Will Byers & Maxine "Max" Mayfield

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Summary:

Max has to meet with her mom, but she doesn't do it alone.

And All in Spite of You

Author's Note:

So here's the first one-shot post "Somewhere I Belong." I hope you guys like it!

Max has never been a particularly patient person. Not over small things, like waiting in line to rent a movie, or with the bigger things, like now, as she waits for her mom to arrive at Hawkins Police Department.

Hopper had called the previous evening to let her know that her mom had come by, insisting on meeting with her to talk. She's not sure how that conversation had gone down exactly, but she's pretty sure it hadn't been pleasant and she felt bad that Hopper had to deal with it. She also knows the conversation she's about to have with her mother isn't going to be pleasant.

She paces the waiting room, chewing absently at her thumbnail. Needless to say, she hadn't slept much the previous night, nor had she paid much attention in school that day.

Steve had tried his best to insist on coming with her but she'd told him no. She didn't want him caught up in the potential crossfire if her mom let it slip to Neil she's staying at his house. For both their sakes, Max feels like her mom having no idea where she's staying is for the best.

"Max?"

Her heart leaps in her chest and she turns, but instead of her mother, Joyce Byers moves toward her with a warm smile, immediately pulling her into a hug.

"What are you doing here?" she asks curiously as she pulls away to look at her friend's mom.

"A little bird told me you could probably use some company," Joyce admits.

Max sighs. "Steve."

"No. Hop, actually." Joyce smiles softly at the surprise on her face. "He wanted to be here, but he got called out. He's very concerned about you. So am I."

She feels her cheeks grow warm. "I'm okay. Really. I'm out now." She gives a shrug, nonchalant as possible.

Joyce sees right through it. "You aren't. But you will be." She squeezes Max's hand. "Until then, I'll just wait with you. Okay?"

Despite her best efforts, Max feels tears burning her eyes. "Okay."

Joyce has only met Susan Hargrove once before, briefly. She'd run into her while Max was in the hospital after a seizure. Now, she sits across from the older redhead in Hopper's office. Max is to Joyce's right, trying so hard not to let either of them know how stressed she is. She wonders if Mrs. Hargrove sees through it the way that Joyce can. She hopes so.

She also doubts it.

Susan's hands are wrapped around a mug of steaming hot coffee, and the silence in the room is tense, stifling. "Max, I want you to come home," Susan begins, and right away Joyce knows this conversation isn't going to go well.

"I'm not coming back." Max's voice is quiet, but firm. "Not unless Neil is gone for good."

She sounds so much more grown up than any thirteen year old should sound, and it makes Joyce's heart feel heavy.

"You can't ask me to choose between you and my husband," Susan says just as quietly, eyes fixed to a spot on the table in front of her.

"No. You already made that choice."

Joyce winces at the bitterness in Max's tone and she reaches out,

giving her arm a gentle squeeze, but remaining silent.

“He feels horrible, Max,” Susan whispers. Her eyes are full of unshed tears, and Joyce notices the woman’s eyes are red-rimmed, dark circles beneath them. “He doesn’t even remember what happened that night. Sweetheart, he was so *drunk*--”

“That doesn’t excuse it!” Max’s voice rises and there’s a moment of silence.

Her mother tries to backtrack a bit. “Of course not. But he would never do those things if he was sober --”

“And what about *you*? You did nothing to try and stop him. You just stood in the hallway and did *nothing*!”

Susan’s gaze drops. “Because Billy handled it,” she says meekly.

“Yeah, well, Billy’s gone now. Hopefully for good, for his own sake. And since I can’t count on you to protect me, I’ll have to protect myself by staying away from both of you.” Joyce isn’t even surprised when Max rises to her feet and heads for the door.

“Maxine, this isn’t your decision to make. You are a *child* and I am your *mother*. You’re coming home with me, and that’s final.”

Joyce’s eyes narrow at the other woman, but before she even has a chance to respond, Max has turned around once more.

“If you try and make me come back? I’ll tell Chief Hopper every single thing that happened that night.”

Slowly, Joyce turns to look at the younger redhead, feeling dread pool in her stomach as realization starts to dawn on her.

“My friends took pictures of all the bruises and marks. With my injuries that were documented at my hospital visit, there’s enough evidence that would put Neil behind bars for years even if *you* don’t want to press charges. So I guess the choice is in your hands, Mom.”

“You’re blackmailing me?” There’s disbelief in Susan’s voice.

"I'm doing what I have to do to stay safe," Max corrects her, still standing by the door.

"I just want my daughter back." Her voice wavers.

"If that were true, you could make it happen. You just won't." Max yanks the office door open and stalks out, leaving Joyce and Susan alone together.

"Is he really worth this?" Joyce can't help but ask as she rises to her feet.

"You wouldn't understand."

She gives Susan a pitying look. "I understand better than you would imagine." She shakes her head and leaves the office, pulling the door shut behind her.

"You know...you're welcome to come and stay with us. We have room."

Max blinks and looks over at Joyce as the woman pulls her car to a stop in the driveway of Steve's house. "Oh. I appreciate that. I'm okay here, though." She offers her a faint smile.

"Steve's a nice young man," she says after a moment, looking hesitant.

"Ms. - um. Joyce." Max draws in a breath and lets it out slowly. "He is. And...I feel safe here." It's the first place she's felt safe in a long time, frankly. But she realizes the implications of what she'd said and rushes to correct herself. "Not that I wouldn't feel safe at your place, too, but -"

"It's okay, Max," Joyce assures her with a soft smile. "Just know that the offer doesn't expire."

Max nods at that, and reaches for the door handle. "Thank you for staying with me."

“Sweetheart...anytime you need anything, you can come to me. Okay? Even if it’s just to talk about things you don’t feel comfortable talking to a bunch of boys about.” There was a hint of something in her voice and Max holds her breath, nodding.

“Okay.” Her voice is hushed, and she climbs out of the car, stuffing her hands into the pockets of her red hoodie. All she wants right now is to crawl into bed. Which she quickly realizes is out of the question for at least the near distant future when she heads inside the house and finds most of the party in the living room.

“Hey. How’d it go?” Lucas rises to his feet, moving toward her quickly, and she’s not ready yet, but she does her best.

“It...went.” She forces a smile that doesn’t reach her eyes.

The concern reflected in his eyes makes her simultaneously want to cry and hide in her room. It’s a struggle for her not to do either at the moment.

“Where’s Steve?”

“He’s in the kitchen. He said he was ordering pizza because there’s not enough leftover lasagna for all of us,” Will pipes up from the couch.

“And he ‘isn’t cooking for all of us’ because he has an essay to work on,” Dustin adds. “There was more profanity involved in his version, though.”

Her lips tug upwards at that and she glances toward the kitchen, then back at her friends. “Okay. I’ll be right back.” She heads to the kitchen, peeking her head in the door and finding Steve at the kitchen table, papers and books spread out in front of him. “Steve?” She steps inside.

He looks up, surprise registering on his face. “Hey. I didn’t hear you come in.” He rises to his feet. “Are you okay?”

Max chews her lower lip. “Yeah. Ms. Byers actually showed up and stayed with me while I talked to my mom.”

“Yeah? How’d it go?”

She looks at him hesitantly. “Not great.”

He steps closer to her. “That bad, huh?” He doesn’t really seem surprised. Then again, there’s no reason for him to be surprised. She isn’t.

“She wanted me to come back.” Max shrugs a shoulder, not quite meeting his eyes. “I told her no. She tried to push the legal issue and...I pushed back.”

Steve’s eyes are sad as he reaches out and squeezes her shoulder gently. “I’m sorry, Max.”

“No. No, it’s okay. I knew that’s what it would come down to eventually.” She’d just hoped...Hell. She didn’t really know what she’d hoped. Maybe that having her and Billy out of the house would make her mom open her eyes. In reality, it hadn’t done a damn thing and she was angry at herself for thinking it even might.

He watches her for a moment. “I guess you saw the shitheads already. They came over right after school to wait for you.”

“Is that okay?” she asks after a second, uncertain.

“Hell, I don’t care. I’d rather all of you be here where I can keep an eye on you than running the streets like little hoodlums.”

Max rolls her eyes. “Yeah, that’s us. Tiny hardcore criminals in the making. Better keep a close eye on us, Officer Harrington.”

He smirks. “Go hang out with your friends. I’ll order pizza in an hour or so, if Dustin can last that long.”

His voice rises toward the end of his statement, and Max knows without looking that Dustin’s behind her at the door.

“An *hour*? Dude, I’ve been starving since *two*,” he complains as he heads for the fridge and grabs a soda.

“Yeah. You know you don’t actually live here, right?”

Max smiles at the playful exchange.

“When a party member takes up residence at a dwelling, all other party members are welcome anytime around the clock. It’s one of the rules.” Dustin shrugs, opening the bottle of soda and taking a drink.

“That’s not a real rule,” Steve responds wryly.

“It is *so*! Ask Mike!” he defends.

Steve and Max exchange a look and she suppresses a chuckle before grabbing Dustin’s arm and propelling them toward the door. “Come on. Let Steve work. I’m kicking everyone out after pizza so he can help me with my homework.” And vice versa.

“We can help you,” he says quickly as he lets her pull him out of the kitchen.

“I know. But tonight’s Steve’s night to help.” She shrugs.

“Steve’s helping you with homework?” Mike’s expression is dubious.

“Yes.” Max gives him a look. “He’s really good at math.” And he explains it in ways that she actually understands.

Lucas scoots over on the couch to make room for her and she drops down beside him easily, sandwiched between him and Will. She’s quiet for a moment and then turns to Will. “Your mom stayed with me today. She’s really great.”

His expression brightens instantly and he nods his agreement. “Yeah, she is.”

She feels a light pressure on her left hand and she glances at Lucas, whose fingers have linked through hers. She squeezes his hand back gently, leaning against the back of the sofa.

“Mike! Tell Max about how it’s a Party rule that all party members are welcome around the clock at each other’s houses! Steve didn’t believe me.”

Max grins involuntarily, leaning against Lucas’ shoulder as all four of

the boys start talking over one another loudly and excitedly.

Suddenly hiding in her room is the last thing on her mind.